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Oral history interview transcript with Elsie Ableman

Elsie Ableman

Dixie Massengale

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ELSIE ABLEMAN
INTERVIEWED BY DIXIE MASSENGALE
EWU Women's Oral History Project
EWU 984-00094 #1
SEPTEMBER 28, 1982

D. MASSENGALE: Interviewing Elsie Ableman for the Women's Oral History Project. The topic is working women. The date is September 28. Okay, Elsie could you repeat for me again a little bit about your background where you were born?

E. ABLEMAN: I was born in Waukon, Washington, February the 4th, 1930. From Waukon Washington we moved to a farm between Edwall and Sprague, Washington where I grew up with my brothers and sisters and parents. We were raised on a farm where my father raised basically wheat and cattle.

D. MASSENGALE: Would you have to do very much, did you work around the farm and the ranch when you were young?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes. In those days it was a rare occasion when we as children would go to town. Our main job was to help in the gardens, help in the fields, help with the harvest, and also my father did milk cows over and above the raising wheat and the beef cattle. So many times I did the evening chores and milked the cattle. It was a full time job for all of us children there were 5 brothers and sisters.

D. MASSENGALE: Did you and your brothers do separate kinds of things because you were a girl and they were boys?

E. ABLEMAN: No. I had 3 brothers and 1 sister and I was the girl who loved to be outdoors. So my father let me work along with my brothers and I liked that type of work so I basically probably would say that I worked outdoors more than indoors because I loved it.

D. MASSENGALE: How about your mother? Would she confine herself mostly to the home or would she . . .

E. ABLEMAN: No, let's see, from what I recall all the family worked together. Well, the women worked together cleaning the house. On Saturday mornings, it was my sister's and my job to clean the house. One would take the upstairs, one would take the downstairs area and we would clean that and then after that was done, all of us would go outdoors and work. Gardening, canning. . .

D. MASSENGALE: Wow.

E. ABLEMAN: Yeah we did, from what I can remember of our childhood, my father was from Sweden and his main goal in life was to work and we had fun, the five children had to make the fun. You know, on the farm.

D. MASSENGALE: Yes.

E. ABLEMAN: But I have fond memories of my childhood.

D. MASSENGALE: Can you remember having, what you wanted to be when you were a little girl? Did you have any aspirations?

E. ABLEMAN: I think I had goals and thoughts of what I would like to be. Of course at that pointing time, it wasn't farming. I think that many times when you grow up on a farm you feel that you want something entirely different. Now I don't feel that way, but I can remember when I was a little girl I had planned on being a teacher as a little girl. I

thought that would be my profession, but however, as I grew older, I thought that I enjoyed math and working with figures and this sort of thing so that's basically the reason I chose banking.

D. MASSENGALE: Did you plan to get married? Did you want to get married and have a family, have children?

E. ABLEMAN: I would say I imagined during the time when I was growing up. I don't believe that going to college and education was probably as important as it is now to our younger people. I don't think the doors were wide open for women as they are now. No, at that time I had planned on getting an education but I also had thought it would be interesting and I was looking forward to becoming a mother and raising a family. Being married. . .

D. MASSENGALE: Then what happened after you graduated from high school?

E. ABLEMAN: I was married. I was married very young. I was married at 18 years old, but I still had. . . I still knew that I was going to have some kind of a career and I don't know now if I were living in these days whether I would be married as young. We had a happy marriage, a good marriage, but I believe now with doors opening to women and younger people, I believe that there is a lot out in this world to learn and to see, and do before marriage.

D. MASSENGALE: So you and Lee got married then and you started working right away after you got married?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes. We were married in 1948 and I believe I started working. . . I imagine about 3 or 4 months after we were married.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay, and that was at. . .

E. ABLEMAN: I started working at the Moses Lake branch of the Seafirst National Bank in 1948. I was trained on the job.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay, so you. . . had you had some like bookkeeping classes and secretary classes or. . .

E. ABLEMAN: I'd taken the bookkeeping and the secretarial classes in high school, perhaps compared to what I would be taking in the schools now perhaps it would not be something that would prepare me for this sort of a job. In those days, they more or less trained you on the job, as far as banking so I think . . .

D. MASSENGALE: And so you were hired as?

E. ABLEMAN: I was hired as a bookkeeper. I started in the bookkeeping department on the job training from bookkeeping and after about 6 or 7 months, I advanced to the teller's position.

E. ABLEMAN: And I worked at Seattle first National Bank in Moses Lake for about 2 years.

D. MASSENGALE: Now tell me if you can remember, after you started working, then did you have any career aspirations? Did you decide right away that you wanted to be the president of a bank or anything like that?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes, I think you do. I think that 'cause I had direction and goals, I wanted to succeed, yes, I wanted to. . .

D. MASSENGALE: Then you weren't going to work just until you had a child. . .

E. ABLEMAN: Oh, no.

D. MASSENGALE: Or just to have some spending money for a little while?

E. ABLEMAN: Oh, no. No that wasn't my. . . I had planned simply because I loved the working world, I liked people, and I just liked working.

D. MASSENGALE: Now I wanted. . .

E. ABLEMAN: It's not that we did need the money naturally, young people starting out, we did need the money, but that wasn't the entire reason. But I had known that I enjoyed the working world.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay, so tell me a little bit about your job then as a teller.

E. ABLEMAN: Okay. As a teller, of course your basic function is paying and receiving, cashing checks of course, you have to learn to be accurate. It's very important to present yourself well to the public.

E. ABLEMAN: Bookkeeping was important. You had to be accurate in this field also. In Moses Lake, I wasn't into loans and disbursements of that sort. But I basically in Moses Lake I would say it was mainly paying and receiving.

D. MASSENGALE: Did you enjoy that?

E. ABLEMAN: I enjoyed that immensely, yes.

D. MASSENGALE: Did you at that time feel that there was opportunity for advancement? You said that you wanted. . . you had aspirations, but was the opportunity actually there?

E. ABLEMAN: At that point in time as far as the women's world in banking, there was just a certain area you could go and that would be about as far as you could go. You could not hold an administrative job or a manager's job or an assistant manager's job. I felt that I wanted to go to the top as high as I could go.

E. ABLEMAN: I wanted to be head teller eventually and that was just about our vault teller or whatever, but as far as management positions at that time there weren't offered to women.

D. MASSENGALE: And who did you work for?

E. ABLEMAN: You mean as far as their names?

D. MASSENGALE: No, do you remember how many people worked there in the bank?

E. ABLEMAN: Oh, yes I recall it was a very, very small bank. It at that time the Seattle First National Bank worked out of a very small building that once was a liquor store. I can remember starting in this bookkeeping department where it perhaps was not larger than, I imagine an 11 by 12 room. There were two bookkeepers, two bookkeeping machines, and we were not on-line, we're not computerized, we're actually working inputting figures into the bookkeeping machine and balancing out the tapes, and the rest of the bank I imagine the office in the bank were about 20 by 24, a very small branch.

D. MASSENGALE: And there were several other women or how many other women did you work with?

E. ABLEMAN: Yeah. In Moses Lake bank at that time it was very seldom that you would see a young boy working as a bookkeeper or a teller. Most of the employees as far as bookkeepers and the tellers were women and young girls. The management of course, was men.

D. MASSENGALE: And how many was it just one manager?

E. ABLEMAN: The assistant manager and the manager and I believe there were about three tellers and two bookkeepers.

D. MASSENGALE: I should have asked you how you got that job.

E. ABLEMAN: I had decided that I wanted to work at a bank. I felt that I liked working with figures and I went down to the bank and I applied. It so happened that they did need an extra bookkeeper at that time. There were three other girls who had applied. At that time I was 18 years old, I had just graduated from high school and I didn't have the experience but I did get the job. And of course, I was very confident that I could do it and I imagine that perhaps helped get the job. After they told me that it would be on the job training and as long as I was interested in figures and liked people and was willing to learn that I would probably succeed. Other than that. . .

D. MASSENGALE: No Problems while you worked there?

E. ABLEMAN: Didn't have any complications, not any problems that I am aware of it seems like. I enjoyed the public and seemed to have a pretty good rapport with them. I, from experience there realized that perhaps banking would be my career.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay, then tell me about when you moved, what happened?

E. ABLEMAN: My husband and I grew up in the Cheney area and we had decided that we would like to locate in the Cheney area rather than in the Moses Lake area. I wrote ahead and applied for a job at the Cheney Bank of the Seattle First National Bank. I received a letter back saying that within four months they would be able to hire me. My husband was hired at the Turnbull Refuge in Cheney. So we did move up. I think that was the year of 1951. I was employed at the bank in 1951 and worked there through 1968. During that time, I raised my three boys. I took off long enough to have them and maybe a month or two afterwards I stayed home, then went back to work. My last boy, who is home with us yet, I had decided that I possibly might try being unemployed and staying home. I had always thought how wonderful it would seem to have summer off and a Christmas holiday. So I did that. In 1968 I terminated at the bank, was home for about 6 months and decided that I just was not a person to stay home and that I needed the outside world and a profession. I felt that I was capable of raising my family and I felt that they were not neglected in doing this.

D. MASSENGALE: How did you feel? How did you feel when you stayed at home for six months?

E. ABLEMAN: Well I thought that I had a lot of time to give in a better way. I believe that all my life I had worked around working outside the home and I think that my days were planned that way and my life was planned in that way and I felt that I wasted a lot of time that I could be putting to better use. . . you know, just. . . doing. I was fortunate to have a good baby-sitter. I was fortunate to have a mother in law who was not working and wanted to take the children part-time. I also had very good baby-sitters that I felt confident were good for my children. I didn't worry about the baby-sitting aspect of working.

D. MASSENGALE: They were really good? You did not have any problems at all meshing your home life and your working life?

E. ABLEMAN: No, it was just a way of life for me. This was one reason I terminated the bank thinking that, I just do not know the difference between working and staying home. I had never tried staying home. In all honesty, I've got to say, I believe that my husband would have liked for me to be home instead of working, where it didn't create any problems. But I think that he felt that he would like to at least have me try it. And as

I say after I was home about six months I wasn't as happy and I don't believe I was as well organized in my home. I think I was a better person working. I believe that I needed that outside association. In 1968, I was reading the Cheney Free Press and an ad came out in the Free Press wanting a manager of Sears Merchant Store. Sears Merchant store had just opened as a new franchise about two years, three years previous to this state, and I thought, "Oh, that sounds like something interesting!" I had never been working as a ... I had always worked for a company, never independently. The Sears Merchant store is a franchise, but it is your independent business and I decided that I would apply for this position.

D. MASSENGALE: Now if it's a franchise it sounds like, don't you buy into it, to get the franchise?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes, you have to buy. You have to buy a Sears business.

D. MASSENGALE: But did you also have to apply for the position?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes

D. MASSENGALE: So, in other words, they won't just let anybody come in there and...?

E. ABLEMAN: Right. You have to apply. First of all you must apply. I wrote to Seattle and I applied. Within three days, the representative was in Cheney interviewing different ones for the position and I felt at that time that well, at least it would be a challenge and I felt that the book work wouldn't bother me. I thought that, you know, that we could manage that. I felt that it might be kind of interesting to rake through a business of your own to see just for the experience. So I interviewed with this representative and the next day he called me and told me I could have the business if I wanted. Well, I had a few sleepless hours that night because I didn't know for sure whether I wanted to jump into this. I slept on it and I thought oh well, why not. Let's try this and see, you know, what this, a business of your own, can bring.

D. MASSENGALE: What about Lee? Where is he in all this decision making process?

E. ABLEMAN: Now Lee, at this point in time, had his own business. He had his upholstery shop. He felt that he wouldn't be able to help me on a daily basis, maybe a part-time basis. There would be many things involved in this little business. There would be, you know, installing washers and dryers, lifting heavy items I possibly could not lift, but we felt that part, you know, doing this part time, he could possibly help enough to . . . until we could hire some extra help as the case may be. You see, he had his own business, he . . . it was called Lee's Upholstery Shop.

D. MASSENGALE: And did he just say, "Well, that's up to you. Elsie whatever you want to do?"

E. ABLEMAN: Yes that's right. He left it up to me.

D. MASSENGALE: Did he have to put up the money or did you have the money or...?

E. ABLEMAN: We had the money. We bought the Sears Merchant store which we were actually buying a Sears Merchant store. You're buying the business and the inventory. As far as when I say inventory, I don't mean the floor items as in the washers and dryers, freezers and refrigerators. We were just buying actually the business and the fixtures that were being installed the store.

D. MASSENGALE: It sounds like he was fair and he wasn't worried about . . .

E. ABLEMAN: No, he wasn't worried about it. He said if you want to take this, you know, opportunity to, you know, try this different profession, you just go ahead. We didn't have that much invested and the representatives seemed to think that it was going to be a business that would grow. And it certainly did. We ran into it and I hired one part time girl. Later on, we had to have two part time girls. Lee helped as much as he possibly could. He got into installing washers and dryers. The business grew through the years. Within five years we were perhaps doubling what we had when we had purchased the business, and it was very interesting. I learned a lot, I do feel from owning our own small business compared to working for a wage, 8 hour day. I feel that I would much rather work for someone else and not have the responsibility of your own business. I do feel like owning your own business it's more the responsibility, I think that you work longer hours, and I think it's a little more difficult. Now this is my personal opinion. Not that I didn't like it. I liked it very much, but I felt that well, when Saturdays and Sundays arrived, you didn't have the freedom that you would have working an 8-hour position. You were on the job constantly. You were either back to the store, you were doing work that you could not do during office hours. You were preparing payroll or reports and this sort of thing. So that is the one reason that I, in my personal opinion, would rather, work for someone else.

D. MASSENGALE: No matter how much money you make? Would there be a way for the money to compensate enough for that?

E. ABLEMAN: I don't think for me it would.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay.

E. ABLEMAN: I think peace of mind and happiness.

D. MASSENGALE: So you enjoy working but you also enjoy relaxing.

E. ABLEMAN: Right that's it. I think peace of mind along with your work means a great lot. It does to me.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay then, did Lee finally sell his store and come to work with you then?

E. ABLEMAN: Lee sold his upholstery, well, I shouldn't say he sold his upholstery shop. He dissolved it and decided that he would help in the store. He did help in the store for the last two years before we sold it. After that, he decided to go to work for the Cheney School District, and he's been there ever since. We kept the Sears store for four or five years, decided after 5 years that it was doing very well and it would be a good time to sell. I myself liked the Sears store, it became a little more than what I had wanted. I had decided through that experience that I would rather work for a company rather than have a business of my own. So we did sell in 1973 and I was off work for approximately 8 months at that time thinking that maybe I would enjoy not working again, it did not. Back to the work world again and was employed at the Cheney Credit Union in 1974 and I'm still working there.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay, I'm intrigued with the when Lee came to work with you now. How did that work out?

E. ABLEMAN: Statistics tell us that husband and wife should never work together. I've got to say that he perhaps. . .he would work half the day. But I have to say from my

experience, I don't think it's the healthiest for a marriage. You're rushed many times at work and maybe you know, I think that maybe you expect more from one another as husbands and wives than you do from your employees. When you get home at night, there isn't much to talk about other than work. You never get work out of your mind. And I just don't think that I would want to do it as a full profession. I think we have a healthier marriage working apart.

D. MASSENGALE: Well, it sounds like since you were the manager there and then he came in, was he? Or were you still the manager after he came in?

E. ABLEMAN: That's interesting. Well, I think that he perhaps did just as much as I as far as making decisions, but I basically had bought, you know, purchased the store and I was registered as the manager as far as Sears was concerned, but Lee I think, was a real help and support to me and made decisions along with me, as far as the employees and the bookwork and the payroll and the functioning. I think I took care of that because he didn't, he didn't learn the books of course because I was automatically doing this and I liked it. I think Lee was helpful in the freight department, in the installing of washers and dryers and you know, the heavier duties that should be done and had to be done. . .

D. MASSENGALE: And how about the decision then to sell? Was that a joint decision? Or was that more your decision once again?

E. ABLEMAN: I believe that . . . I have to be honest in saying that was perhaps my decision. I decided, I think perhaps what bothered me most was I liked the counter work. I liked taking orders. I liked being out front visiting with the customers, but there is a lot of back work in the back; receiving freight, lifting heavy, you know, items that would come in that I couldn't do and I didn't like to do. Many times, during the hours that we were open, where maybe Lee wasn't with me or maybe one of my part time helpers were not there, it would be very difficult, you know, for me to lift these items and work in the back. This is, I think, the main part of the job that I got very tired of. I felt that after a few years that I perhaps worked much harder than when I did at the bank. I also felt that I felt a freedom walking out the door in my working positions at the bank. I felt freedom when I walked out the door. In the evenings I didn't feel it having my own business. I felt freedom on weekends that I didn't feel it working at the Sears store because I was always having to work at the store or I was always having to think about payroll, thinking about books, thinking about freight, thinking about finishing this job so we could face Monday thinking about who was going to work for us on Saturdays. It was just a good experience. I learned a lot, but I also learned that I am happier working an eight-hour day than having a business.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay, let's go back to the Seattle First when you came here. Who hired you? Was Ed Betz here then?

E. ABLEMAN: Cheney . . .

D. MASSENGALE: Was that branch here then?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes. Let's see, no I take that back. Ed Betz was the assistant manager at that time or a teller. A man by the name of Henry Rea was the manager of the Cheney bank at that time. And he is. . .

D. MASSENGALE: And then Ed Betz is the assistant manager.

E. ABLEMAN: That is true, and Henry Rea was transferred to a different management position. Ed Betz, at that point in time, took over the management. Thereafter, he was the manager through the time I worked at Cheney Bank.

D. MASSENGALE: And who. . . did other women work there with you, anybody?

E. ABLEMAN: Oh yes. There were many women working at the Cheney bank. In fact, all of us were women, other than the officers. I believe there were three officers. That would be the manager, the assistant manager and the ICD manager. Those were the three men. The rest were women. There were about at that point in time. There again, we were not of course not on computer. We had the basic bookkeeping machines. We literally set down punched figures, balanced books from the tapes, there were two bookkeepers and there were three tellers at that time when I first started at Cheney.

D. MASSENGALE: Then you went through the computer transition, right?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes.

D. MASSENGALE: What did you think or what are your thoughts on that?

E. ABLEMAN: That was confusion, I think it's very difficult for a business to enter a computer program. There are a lot of errors to correct. There's a lot of getting to understand the printouts that come back. The printing is . . . there are the printouts; they go on forever, and you do have to learn to read these. They're telling us, but many times we're not understanding at first. It takes a good few months to get everything organized. To computerize the business, it's very difficult, it's difficult for the employees.

D. MASSENGALE: What are your thoughts? Would you rather live before the computers or after the computers if you had your choice?

E. ABLEMAN: All of us know that computers are set up to handle the volume of business. In this case I would hate to think of trying to handle the. . .

D. MASSENGALE: So you don't have really emotional feelings about computers like some people do?

E. ABLEMAN: Well I haven't had a drastic experience, I do know, sometimes it takes an act of congress to erase a problem once it occurs. I do think that if we learn to understand, it can be corrected and there's nothing real drastic and I realize that we would not be able to handle the volume of business now without the computers.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay, and you explained that you quit in 1968 just purely because you decided you would like to try staying home for a while?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes, after 20 years I had worked, you understand, from the time that I was a very young girl. . .

E. ABLEMAN: We worked very hard on the farm and worked from the time I was married, not because I disliked like it, because I wanted to. I had decided that for two reasons, my youngest boy was very small at that time. I had put in 20 years at the bank at that time there were very few fringe benefits for women. We did not have a pension, we did not have any fringe benefits.

D. MASSENGALE: Did you have medical?

E. ABLEMAN: We had medical.

D. MASSENGALE: Did you have hospitalization.

E. ABLEMAN: We had hospitalization but. . .

D. MASSENGALE: Did you have retirement?

E. ABLEMAN: We did not have a retirement at that point in time. I believe about 2 or 3 years after I had terminated, I believe they started offering this to women of the banking field. However at that time we had a profit sharing thing that we invested in, we had Medical, we had this sort of thing but as far as other fringe benefits, there were none . . . I felt that I was not giving up too much by terminating due to this fact . . . the thing I was giving up was seniority. That I had put 20 years in that I at that time I felt pretty sure that I was going to retire and stay at home. If I had known, perhaps I would have taken a leave of absence. I did stay home for the few months and did enjoy my youngest child, but I did feel that after a few months that it was not my world, I needed to get out in the working world again. That is when I took over the Sears store. After I sold it, I decided I was going to continue working and I felt also that I would like to work in a field where I would work with figures and people and I felt that it was going to be something I enjoyed. I felt that I didn't want to be tied down to a job where there was a lot of stress and straining, and I had to leave that one position before I went back to work.

D. MASSENGALE: All right, tell me what you do now then.

E. ABLEMAN: Okay, I work at the Cheney Credit Union. Basically we are a savings and loan institution. Paying and receiving. We are into loans; we disperse loans. In fact, Betty Zarenka who is the manager of the Credit Union, I'm the assistant manager, we carry out all functions at the Credit Union. Basically, much like banking, we computerize, we are on the computer now we feed to the computer. We run the office generally. We do have part time help occasionally, during payroll time, during vacation time, and this sort.

D. MASSENGALE: What do you enjoy most about your job there?

E. ABLEMAN: I do enjoy the Credit Union. I feel that it's a pleasant job. It's free from pressures. I enjoy, basically I think I enjoy people. I just do. I enjoy being out in the public. I enjoy the people who come in. It's nice to be able to work in a . . . business small enough where you know everyone who comes through the door. You call them by their first name. And it's a very pleasant thing in this day.

D. MASSENGALE: How about what you find frustrating? Is there anything frustrating about your job there?

E. ABLEMAN: Oh, I think all of us have to be honest, there are days when you are frustrated. There are certain jobs I think in every area of certain jobs, filing insurance, filing period.

D. MASSENGALE: Some things you just don't like?

E. ABLEMAN: Things you just don't care that much about. Basically I think . . . I don't think that we've had any jobs that I can truly say that I disliked too.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay. What has been the general reaction of your family to working?

E. ABLEMAN: Very positive.

D. MASSENGALE: How about your children?

E. ABLEMAN: Positive.

D. MASSENGALE: Did you get a lot of support? Did they help you with the house work for instance. . .

E. ABLEMAN: They never did make me feel guilty as far as working. Possibly because this is a way of life and we live that way. possibly we enjoyed them on

weekends, we enjoyed them in the evenings. Everyone worked together to help one another. I think that's due to the fact that I didn't raise girls, the boys, helped as much as they could. Never did complain about me working. My husband, where as I feel that if he had his preference I'm quite sure that he would have rather had me home. Never did complain, however, and was very supportive.

D. MASSENGALE: Did he help at home?

E. ABLEMAN: He was very busy in his hobbies and his positions whereas I didn't feel that I would expect him to help. In fact this is what I should say. I felt that if I wanted to work, I felt that I should be able to take care of my home and my obligations at home. That would make me feel better about working. And it's saying that I was pretty well organized that I felt that. . . I guess what I'm saying is that if I could do my work at home I felt that I shouldn't feel guilty about working about making it a hardship on my family. But they were very good. I didn't have to tell them. They just pitched in and helped. They did not complain and working together made it more successful.

D. MASSENGALE: Have you ever felt any negative reactions from the people in Cheney to you as a woman who was working in a particular position at wherever that might have been in Cheney?

E. ABLEMAN: I did not, no. I was not working in a position such as that.

D. MASSENGALE: Have you seen any changes in the attitudes of Cheney people or the Cheney business community towards women working? When you got that Sears store in, for instance, 1968 was it?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes.

D. MASSENGALE: Were there other women who owned stores in the area or owned businesses in Downtown Cheney? Were you unique in any way? Did you feel different or did you get any reaction at all from the community?

E. ABLEMAN: No, I did not. I believe that. . . I think from the time that I started working in 1948 to the late 60's, I feel that job positions for women possibly were not as open as they were at the time I started with Sears. At that time I think that the women's work world was opening up for job positions and supervisory positions. Before that date, I might have felt uncomfortable. But I purchased the store during the time when I felt that women were accepted in the working world.

D. MASSENGALE: Did you join the chamber of commerce, or is there a business organization or business in the area?

E. ABLEMAN: Chamber of Commerce of Cheney.

D. MASSENGALE: Did you join that?

E. ABLEMAN: We did at one time and then I guess simply because we didn't have time to go to the meetings because I couldn't leave work, I did not at that point in time.

D. MASSENGALE: But no reaction or anything?

E. ABLEMAN: No.

D. MASSENGALE: Because you were a woman particularly? Okay, this is a hard question, an ambiguous question I guess: Do you think working women have made a contribution to the growth and the development of Cheney?

E. ABLEMAN: Well, yes. I believe that, when both men and women are able and accepted to work together. I've believed that as a contribution to any town.

D. MASSENGALE: Well, you certainly did too by owning a business.

E. ABLEMAN: True, true. And I believe that I myself have learned a lot in owning a business of my own. I believe that each time a woman is successful, in her own business I believe that it shows our talent, our world, that woman can also hold management positions and be successful. And I think that each time a woman is successful that it restores other women, showing that they are just as competent as the men.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay, if you could be 16 again and live your life over again, would you make any changes?

E. ABLEMAN: If I could be 16 again and live my life over, I think that all of us probably would make a few changes. So I think that if I . . . I believe that I would take advantage of the education that's offered to our young people. There's a big world out there, I perhaps wouldn't, not that we haven't had a good marriage, I probably would do other things before marriage. In those years, the doors perhaps were not as wide open for the younger people, we probably did not have the opportunities that we would have now. Yes, I think that I perhaps would now probably say that I would go on and become a teacher.

D. MASSENGALE: Really?

E. ABLEMAN: I like what I have done. I have not regretted what I have done. I have felt good about what I've done, but I believe if I had my life to live over, I would graduate from college, I would probably go into the teaching profession, maybe some other profession, but I would go through college. When I was younger I would have done some traveling that would probably be open to younger people that were not open to us as young people in those years.

D. MASSENGALE: Would you rather be growing up now as opposed to the time when you grew up?

E. ABLEMAN: I think it's a more of a difficult world for young people now than when I grew up. I believe it's much more difficult. I'm not saying that I would rather . . . I would perhaps. If I were to, I would probably do things a little differently as far as my education is concerned.

D. MASSENGALE: Now, could you tell me a little bit about your social life?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes.

D. MASSENGALE: What kinds of things do you do for fun?

E. ABLEMAN: What do we enjoy for fun? Okay.

D. MASSENGALE: And someone mentioned that you played in a band.

E. ABLEMAN: We do have fun. Yes. I think that's what's made our life so interesting. My husband and I enjoy doing the same things. I think that I can say that, we never go through a week where we don't have fun, and I think that's part of living. I think that's what keeps us looking forward to new things.

D. MASSENGALE: Helps you stay married?

E. ABLEMAN: This is true. Well, we have basically had this thing, my husband has grown up in a musical family. I basically am probably not as musical as he but I have learned to appreciate music, I took piano lessons when I was very young. My husband decided when he raised a family that they were going to be introduced to music. He would love to have his boys learn to appreciate music.

D. MASSENGALE: Oh really?

E. ABLEMAN: Well, at the time I . . . middle boy was 9 years old, we rented a steel guitar, and he started steel guitar lessons. He was very young, the teacher didn't know whether he would succeed but he was very successful. My oldest boy learned to play the Spanish guitar, and my husband played the guitar so they did this, for enjoyment over a period of years, we belonged to the grange at that point in time. They entered grange contests and they formed their own little family band and they won a trip to Peoria, Illinois when my youngest son was about 9 or 10 years old. They took second place in State for a family band.

D. MASSENGALE: How exciting!

E. ABLEMAN: It was real exciting for all of us, we had fun doing this and of course the family went together for the following years and played for grange dances occasionally, and played just for our own enjoyment at family gatherings. I think that this was very healthy for the family. It was something that we could do together and something that kept us together and we had fun doing it.

D. MASSENGALE: Yeah, but you didn't tell me about you.

E. ABLEMAN: I did not get involved in the band. I play the piano for my own enjoyment but I did not learn to play the guitars and this was more or less guitar. I basically was there with them and having fun with them and.

D. MASSENGALE: When they go out to play like for dances, you wouldn't play the piano? It was just a guitar band?

E. ABLEMAN: No, it was just a guitar band. It was just my boys and my husband, but I was there with them having fun.

D. MASSENGALE: Yeah.

E. ABLEMAN: Encouraging them on. We enjoyed that with the family. My husband and I enjoy dancing, we love to dance. In fact I imagine the very first few years we've been married, we didn't miss a Saturday night going out to the dances. We still do. We enjoy it. We enjoy swimming, we enjoy boating, and we enjoy skiing. We just enjoy going out and actually, my husband will call me and say, let's go have a cup of coffee. We enjoy just going out for a social cup of coffee. Yes, so it's kind of fun we. . .

D. MASSENGALE: Well I can see why then when you were talking about the business now, you do need times for those kinds of things.

E. ABLEMAN: That's right. You do need time for those kinds of things. This is true, this is true. We were so dedicated to the business that we had for five years that we were not able to get away and have the fun times that we both enjoyed.

D. MASSENGALE: Do you downhill ski?

E. ABLEMAN: This is more or less water-skiing. We have tried snow skiing. We are amateurs at it but I think it's something that we probably enjoy.

D. MASSENGALE: And so do you have like a two week vacation a year. . .

E. ABLEMAN: Yes.

D. MASSENGALE: What kinds of things do you do on your vacation?

E. ABLEMAN: We have a cabin at Priest Lake and we enjoy going up to priest lake. We do a lot of boating and water skiing and, we do a lot of hiking. We love to hike, and we're not professional golfers but we have friends who like to golf and we do golf with them occasionally. Basically we do like to try new things. It's fun.

D. MASSENGALE: Now, are you looking forward to your second retirement now? Do you not want to retire?

E. ABLEMAN: No, no. I think it's gonna be interesting. I am looking forward to it. I think we're going to have fun. The only thing that bothers me is that I do love the working world. I love to be around people. As long as we can retire and still have the . . . association with people I think that it's going to be very successful, and whereas my husband has hobbies of his own, I mean, he is very talented in building with his hands. He likes to design, all sorts of areas. As far as I am concerned I like to sew, I like to read. I love to work out in the yard. I love gardening. So I don't think there will be any problems in retirement at all. I'm looking forward to it. I just don't like the fact that, you know, retirement means age.

D. MASSENGALE: How about the grange? I don't know anything at all about the grange. When you are connected to the grange, do you go to grange meetings or. . .

E. ABLEMAN: Yes to be a granger? You do attend grange meetings which usually are once a month. Now I have not been active in the grange for quite a few years. Grange is more of a lodge it's ritual.

D. MASSENGALE: It is? Do you know what the original purpose of the grange was?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes, for farmers, this is a farmer's organization. It's more or less just an organization of farmers. Another thing I believe that it was meant to hold the community together. In most communities, the only thing that they did have as far as a social function was a grange meeting.

D. MASSENGALE: And as a young child did your family belong to the grange?

E. ABLEMAN: Oh, yes. That was one of the many, many happy memories. We worked very hard during the weeks and months and looked forward to the grange meetings. At that time the grange had many functions for young people and many times we would have dances afterwards. We would have dinners, we would have gatherings on weekends, functions. . . social functions for the young people. I think that grange at that time probably did do that for the younger people in the community maybe possibly than they do now. But the grange at that time was a big part of our life.

D. MASSENGALE: And it's continued on?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes it is.

D. MASSENGALE: Even though you're not farmers, it's still in the background.

E. ABLEMAN: Yes, and we still are members of the grange. Whereas I can say we are not that active as far as attending meetings but still, we're members.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay, are there any local events in Cheney that stand out in your mind particularly?

E. ABLEMAN: Local events that we look forward to? I think that most everything as far as happenings in Cheney is fun and interesting. I think the Rodeo Days are growing to the point where I think everyone looks forward to it. It's a big thing, as far as Cheney.

D. MASSENGALE: How about while. . . did anything ever happen to you while you were working? I asked Florence Rue once and they said they thought they had a bank robber once. Did anything happen like that, this was a traumatic sort of a thing?

E. ABLEMAN: Oh yes. When I was working for the bank in Moses Lake, we had a warning, they warned us, they told us, "Do not be alarmed but the FBI were canvassing the town, they were walking around the streets watching the bank because they had word

that Moses Lake branch was going to be robbed that particular day. Naturally, you're not entirely comfortable during this time. That was probably one of the traumatic experiences I had while I was working at the bank. Nothing happened however, and I think another time that I was very, very frightened and closest to thinking that I was being robbed was at the Cheney Bank. It was during the summer time when the college was having the deaf in through the summer sessions. Apparently, now I think we perhaps they should have notified us that someone might come in and hand us a note. This happened to me, this particular person came up to the window and he just didn't say anything of course. He just handed me a note and I was staring at this thinking, "Oh, no. What is in this note?" This is it, but it wasn't, it was a particular person doing what he was supposed to do as far as his college education was concerned that apparently he had this specific program to meet and then I was supposed to indicate on this note how he reacted. I felt like saying, "Well, how I reacted was. . ." And I thought this was about the closest I believe ever came, as far as being startled as far as working at the bank. And that was perhaps fortunate.

D. MASSENGALE: Anything else happen in Cheney? Like any fires or anything like that, any celebrations that come to mind?

E. ABLEMAN: During those years . . . you'd think that after 20 years something traumatic would have happened, not that really come to my mind. I think probably the most traumatic thing that happened was just been the recent one, the bank robbery at the Farmer's and Merchant's bank plus the fire at the college in one day. I think that's probably . . . well, another traumatic thing that happened in the Cheney area, I think this was, it's been perhaps fifteen, sixteen years ago when we had these terrible fires. We had a very, very warm, hot summer, and we had the fires that started in the Anvil area that burned out many homes and also another fire that same summer during the same time that the Anvil fire was out of control, another fire in Tyler set by the highway and most of the Tyler area or a great lot of the Tyler area was burned out at that time. That was a traumatic thing. I didn't realize you know what a disaster fire could be until that time. Other than that, I think, I can't remember anything real traumatic happening around Cheney.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay. I'm going to ask you about. . . just some national trends and see if you have any reaction to this. Do you remember anything at all about the Depression?

E. ABLEMAN: I was born about the time the Depression I think was. . .

D. MASSENGALE: Starting?

E. ABLEMAN: Around when it was starting, yeah, in '29. I was born in 1930. As a result I don't remember that much about it. I can remember my parents telling about the hard times that they experienced, but I did not remember much due to the fact that I was so young. I can remember living in this little farm that we lived on. I can remember not having running water in the house. I can remember that 5 of us had to take turns having baths in this cute little metal bathtub. And the first one in was lucky, you know. I can remember my mother cooking on the wood stove with the reservoir on the stove to heat the water. I can remember all this, but at that point in time, I didn't think we were sacrificing at all. To me it was fun times.

D. MASSENGALE: How about World War II?

E. ABLEMAN: Okay, I can remember a few things about World War II. For instance, I can remember, I believe that I was a freshman in high school and I recall that they announced that the world that we were in the war but I can remember they were...

D. MASSENGALE: Were we in the war?

E. ABLEMAN: We were in the war but I can remember they were. . . no, it wasn't that I think at that time it was the end of the war. They were announcing that it was the end of the war. Everyone was just this tickled. . . .

D. MASSENGALE: What year, '45?

E. ABLEMAN: 1945. Happened in '45, that was right. I can remember at that time, what a beautiful thing that was, everyone was, even young high school kids, we were so thrilled to think. . .

D. MASSENGALE: Did anything... Was that in Waukon?

E. ABLEMAN: That was in Edwall.

D. MASSENGALE: Did anything happen that day? Did they let out school or do anything?

E. ABLEMAN: I don't believe that they did. No. Nowadays they might have, at that time, no.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay, how about in the '60s? With for instance the civil rights movement and the peace movement? Do you have any recollections of that? Any feelings or. . . ? Did that make any impression upon you here in Cheney?

E. ABLEMAN: Don't think it had a big impact on Cheney at that time. I don't think so. We read about it, but as far as Cheney area at that point in time, no, Cheney area was not too moved on that, as I can remember.

D. MASSENGALE: How about the women's movement, say as it's progressed now through the 60's and the 70's, Do you feel like it had any impact on Cheney?

E. ABLEMAN: Oh, I believe that sure. I am liberated to a certain extent. I believe that we as women are capable of filling the positions and doing just as good of job as men. I feel. . . sure I think on the community I think women have the rights as well as the men, I think it's an asset to our town. I think that women probably are a little more sensitive and flexible probably in certain positions and where men perhaps are not, I think it's fortunate that the women have been accepted as well as we have.

D. MASSENGALE: Do you feel that, as a woman, you've brought some special qualities to the jobs that you've had? That you've done?

E. ABLEMAN: Why, sure. Sure. I think so. I think this is true. I think that all of us like to feel complex, and I do. I think that all of us have a direction, we all have a goal, and I think that in order to be successful, we have to love others and we have to love ourselves. We have to feel confident. We do.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay, are there any particular women in your life that you have ...?

E. ABLEMAN: Oh, I think that all of us have our models and as a little girl there were girls. . .

E. ABLEMAN: I think that when we see a successful woman. I think that all of us probably want that success, but I think I feel confident that I can do my job and I think that's the whole. . . . I think when we feel worthy and we feel confident I don't think that

we have to wish that we could, you know, be someone else. I think that I want to be my own person, not that I don't admire successful women. I do that, I admire them, I think it's fantastic, and I think that's great, but I think that all of us, you know, have a direction. We all have a goal and I think when you do have the confidence, we don't have to desire or to be someone else.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay. That's a good answer. I mean to that question. That was one I hadn't really thought about. But I think in the absence of role models, which maybe you grew up in a time when there weren't a lot of role models.

E. ABLEMAN: Yes.

D. MASSENGALE: It had to come from within.

E. ABLEMAN: That's right and you know, you had to produce, you had to. . . I think you have to do to gain your confidence. You have to be success, I mean success is confidence. You have to be successful in order to gain your confidence and you have to work at it. I perhaps, like you say if I had to live my life over I would probably do other things, but I can't look back now and say I'm sorry for what I've done, well, I think that happiness is being successful in what you enjoy. I think a lot of us can have administrative jobs and many are not happy in these positions but I think it all adds up to success and happiness and feeling a worth, you know, feeling good about yourself.

D. MASSENGALE: What do you think about Cheney?

E. ABLEMAN: I love Cheney

D. MASSENGALE: What do you like about Cheney?

E. ABLEMAN: Oh, I love the people. I love the town. I think that we're so fortunate to have the good schools that we have. . . I think we're fortunate to have the good people in the town I think that we're fortunate to have the privilege of going to a larger town if we wish. We're not confined to a small area, I think that we're fortunate to have the college that we have. There's a lot to do up there. Take advantage of the Phase and the number of things that you can do and you know, I love children. I mean. . .

D. MASSENGALE: Okay. Is there anything else that you want to tell me or say?

E. ABLEMAN: At this point in time, I can't think of anything other than I think the women's privilege to be in the work world now is fantastic.

D. MASSENGALE: And I should ask you, can you see the changes? Can you see changes that have occurred since the time you began working and now?

E. ABLEMAN: Oh, oh yes. Oh yes. Doors are so open to women now. There is, you know, there is just no stopping now. You can become managers, you can become executives. We're accepted and I think there is just no comparison as to the advantages compared to 25 years ago. I mean it's certainly. It's a women's world.

D. MASSENGALE: It's interesting, it's like, your generation who moved sort of into that. Not that we haven't always had working women but your generation, that kind of were the forerunners, and now it's really open.

E. ABLEMAN: In fact I think that I have to say when I first started into the working world I think it was frowned upon more than it is now for women to work. I think they basically felt that the woman's place is in the home. Now we hardly think about this. I think at that point in time you heard that the woman's place was in the home and now, I don't believe that.

D. MASSENGALE: It sounds like you had a really strong . . .you were raised with a really strong work ethic though.

E. ABLEMAN: Yes.

D. MASSENGALE: That kind of overshadowed that what society was telling you in the magazines and so on and so forth that was, you know, so overwhelming.

E. ABLEMAN: Yes. I had a father who was very strict, you know, he. . . there was just one thing in life and that was work. We were brought up and he was very strict, very particular about his children working.

D. MASSENGALE: But at the same time, you had a great, great capacity for enjoying yourself.

E. ABLEMAN: Yes I did right! The five of us, we worked hard and we played hard.

D. MASSENGALE: So it sounds like it kind of made had a nice balance.

E. ABLEMAN: It was a nice balance. I enjoy playing a lot. I enjoy working but I do think we do have to have some enjoyment along with our work.

D. MASSENGALE: Right, okay, Elsie your husband also owned a trailer park.

E. ABLEMAN: Yes. Many years ago, about 25 years ago traveling to Cheney, we had spotted this little place about a mile west of Cheney. My husband said, "If that ever comes up for sale, I'm going to buy it."

D. MASSENGALE: It was just a piece of property?

E. ABLEMAN: Just a little old house. It was kind of a cabin-like house with almost four acres, you know. This property did come up for sale. We had just moved to Cheney. We did not have money. We were young, just struggling. My husband, at that time, decided he was going to buy it and borrow the down payment. We borrowed the down payment, he borrowed the five hundred dollars, and we bought this piece of property and this little cabin-like home. We moved into it, remodeled the home, enlarged it to the extent where we had an extra kitchen instead of the kitchen and living room being combined into one room, and one bedroom. We decided at that time that we would like to start a trailer park. At that time we got a permit for about 3 trailer spaces. As the years went on, we kept enlarging, up to the point where we have 23 spaces now. And we have lived and managed, we have lived in the trailer park and managed the trailer park now for about 23 years. It's been interesting. We've had a lot of renters, most of them being college students. We like it, it's been work. It's a lot of the extra bookkeeping.

D. MASSENGALE: And this is something you've done in addition to all your other jobs?

E. ABLEMAN: That is right,

D. MASSENGALE: When you come home from work?

E. ABLEMAN: When we come home from work, right.

D. MASSENGALE: Wow.

E. ABLEMAN: We have, due to this, I imagine our yard work is probably much greater than many people.

D. MASSENGALE: I imagine.

E. ABLEMAN: We have to. . . not only do we expect the renters to take care of their yard, we do if they do not, we usually go in and take care of it for them. Just managing 23 units is a full time job. But we have over the 23 years, we have made it possible to live there and relax with it.

D. MASSENGALE: You know, what comes to my mind is we're talking about women like for example, there are so many more opportunities in one way, but in other ways, you and your husband have had so many opportunities and done so many things that young couples today, can never begin to do, the things that you've done.

E. ABLEMAN: Well I . . . perhaps that's true. I think that we've probably have had a very busy life, but I think that what has kept us going and enthused is that we've had fun with what we've done. I think perhaps both of us are blessed with good health. Both of us have are enthused have a lot of energy and like people.

D. MASSENGALE: But don't you think too that it would be difficult for someone now? For your children for example to do the things to buy the. . .

E. ABLEMAN: I think probably. . .

D. MASSENGALE: Buy the businesses?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes, it takes, you know. . .

D. MASSENGALE: To get started in the business occupations?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes it is. Oh, you bet it is. It takes a lot of financing, it takes a lot of nerve. . . it takes a lot of work. We have worked very hard through the years. But as I say, we've involved a lot of fun with it and I imagine that has probably kept us going, knowing that we had to be successful once we started. We certainly I think have been.

D. MASSENGALE: Sure.

E. ABLEMAN: In our business adventures, and I'm sure it's very unusual that an owner would keep a piece of property for 23 years and not ever sell it. That's probably very unusual nowadays. In fact you see, we have owned this piece of property for about 25 years now, and I think this is very unusual, and it has been a growing trailer park in those years.

D. MASSENGALE: You probably could have just stayed home and managed that I would think.

E. ABLEMAN: Well I didn't really want.

D. MASSENGALE: That sounds like it was a job to me! But that wasn't even a job to you?

E. ABLEMAN: That wasn't too inspiring. I needed something more.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay. It just seems like you have really been a busy person.

E. ABLEMAN: Yes I have. We're a busy world, but I think it's been healthy. I think a busy mind is a healthy mind.

D. MASSENGALE: How about your children? Are they all, involved?

E. ABLEMAN: Oh, yes. They have helped us very much. We've been a real close family. They still . . . I have two older boys who have moved out and they are very, very close. They enjoy what we are doing. They enjoy coming home. They enjoy sharing what they're doing. They enjoy sharing what we are doing, and it's been a fun thing for them. They have helped us. They have worked, just like we worked as little children. During the time that we were building the trailer park and maintaining it, they as younger boys had to help mow the lawns, water, help with the building.

D. MASSENGALE: Do the two older ones have jobs now?

E. ABLEMAN: Yes, my oldest boy is a student at Eastern, Eastern Washington University, right now. He is majoring in Physical Ed and History. My second boy is in fact, he has purchased four rentals in the trailer park and he is working for the school

district right now and is planning on going to some vocational school as soon as he can. He's married and he has a little girl. My youngest boy is a senior in high school right now.

D. MASSENGALE: Okay. Thank you.